DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 162 703 JC 790 005

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TITLE Teaching Lower Division Hebrew Language and Literature at a Two-Year Public College.
PUB DATE Nov 78
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Professors of Hebrew (New Orleans, Louisiana, November 18-21, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Curriculum; *College Language Programs; Community Colleges; Cultural Background; Cultural Education; *Ethnic Studies; *Hebrew; *Jews; *Junior Colleges; Literature; Program Descriptions; Student Characteristics; Teaching Techniques
IDENTIFIERS *Jewish Studies

ABSTRACT

The Jewish studies program at Los Angeles Valley College is discussed with an emphasis on the teaching of lower division Hebrew language. As the first two-year undergraduate program in the nation, it seeks to provide an appreciation of Jewish civilization. The program includes classes in Hebrew language, literature, civilization, Jewish philosophy, history, sociology, religion, Talmud, Yiddish literature and language, the Holocaust, and Jewish-American literature. The language classes are a self-contained unit with little connection with the content classes. Understanding, speaking, reading, and writing are stressed as the student is exposed to the structural principles of modern Hebrew grammar, while concentrating on linguistic Hebrew. Instruction in Hebrew literature uses a historical-critical method emphasizing the literature as an interpretation of history; where the instructor takes a more passive role allowing the students to have an interactive experience. A study of those students enrolled in Jewish studies courses from 1970 to 1975 found that 76% were Jewish, 80% were transfer students, and 51% were over 21. The majority were housewives over 35, who were married daughters of immigrant Jews. Fifty-five percent were the products of Jewish secondary education. A syllabus for a modern Hebrew literature course is included. (MB)

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TEACHING LOWER DIVISION HEBREW LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE AT A TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGE

by Zev Garber
Los Angeles Valley College

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JC 790 005

Presented at the annual meeting of the National Association of Professors of Hebrew, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 18-21, 1978.

TEACHING LOWER DIVISION HEBREW LANGUAGE

AND LITERATURE AT A TWO-YEAR PUBLIC COLLEGE

One of the important goals of introductory college classes in Jewish Studies is an appreciation of the Jewish civilization as one of Western man's primary responses to the needs of the human predicament. The time is long overdue to academically present a systematic study of the Jewish people and their traditions as important elements in world culture. The introductory student of Jewish Studies should be exposed to an understanding of the history, culture and literary traditions of the Jews as an influential force in the history of man, and to the dynamics of Judaism as an ethnic-universal religion. The student should also be taught that Jewish Studies is not just an attempt, however important, in discovering one's identity, but he must be made aware of the laborious work involved in a critical, disciplined study of origins, sources, materials and methodology.

The author has pioneered the first two-year undergraduate Jewish Studies program in the nation at Los Angeles Valley College which is designed to meet these needs. The program insists upon a solid introduction to Hebrew language studies. To this core the student adds a variety of courses, some required, and some optional. The program includes classes in Hebrew language, literature, civilization, Jewish philosophy, history, sociology, religion, Talmud, Yiddish literature and language, the Holocaust and Jewish American literature. Future offerings will include classes in Sephardic culture, Jewish folklore and biblical archaeology. The present program is supplemented by out of class cultural hours, Jewish seminars, community action projects, a monthly department newsletter, and the sponsorship of three clubs on campus, including Eta Beta Rho, an academic group of

Jewish Studies majors, under the co-sponsorship of the National Association of Professors of Hebrew. This is an impressive accomplishment, especially when one considers the aims and restrictions of a community college system (e.g., two-years only course offerings).

The observations made on what can and cannot be done in the area of Hebrew language and Hebrew literature in translation at a two-year community college level are based on the writer's participation as a teacher and department chairman of Jewish Studies at Los Angeles Valley College, which already is serving as a lower division model for identifying aims, objectives, and philosophy in emerging Jewish Studies classes at community colleges, locally and nationally.

The Hebrew language classes taught in the two-year program at Los Angeles Balley College are a self-contained unit, and are barely connected with the content classes. The Hebrew language is studied in a basic, systematic way. The four fundamental skills of a language: understanding, speaking, reading and writing, are stressed from the very beginning. The student is exposed to the structural principles of modern Hebrew grammar, concentrating on linguistic Hebrew. He acquires an elementary and intermediate reading knowledge of vocalized and unvocalized texts in modern Hebrew, with a knowledge of the biblical style. He is able to compose simple sentences and compositions. After two semesters, he acquires a basic biblical-modern Hebrew vocabulary augmented with a specialized vocabulary and many useful idiomatic expressions. Development of oral proficiency is achieved by the application of the oral-aural methodology in the classroom, frequent oral question-answer exercises, and a generous use of conversational Hebrew. Carefully graded stories are utilized to promote reading ability and comprehension. Biblical narratives are selected from portions of the

Pentateuch and prophets, and modern Hebrew history and folklore, and life in Israel and America.

Elementary Hebrew I is an example of a semester Hebrew language course taught at Valley. The five-unit course meets for approximately 4 1/2 hours per week, in sessions of approximately 54 minutes each (adjusted for actual time spent in study of a one hour scheduled class), or approximately 81 hours per semester. Of this time about two-thirds is devoted to numerous and varied exercises, drills, lectures explaining the philology, morphology, syntax, and dialectology of the complex Hebrew grammatical structure, etc., and one-third to an audio-visual appreciation of the language. Students are obligated to spend an additional hour per week in the language laboratory, reviewing the oral-aural material on the tapes based on the textual material. The reading of unvocalized Hebrew sentences and the writing of simple compositions are major foci at the end of the semester.

It is not particularly difficult to teach beginners Hebrew to English speakers, once the barrier of a totally unfamiliar alphabet is overcome (and one must not underestimate the time needed to overcome the first barrier). For despite the totally different linguistic principles underlying the development of the two languages, contrastive analysis is a very fruitful method of teaching Hebrew grammar, since the sentence structure and word order of the two languages are directly comparable. Of course, the instructor must be certain that the students are familiar with the principles of English grammar first. The time to review these is well spent, and students quickly become sensitive to the skills necessary to analyze and apply the principles of Hebrew grammar. It is in this area especially, that the instructor needs to develop written exercises and drills lacking in most textbooks. I personally have found that a study of basic textbooks in

modern European languages yields much help here.

A major problem in this class is the lack of a good text. In past semesters, students were not enthusiastic about the textbook, and were undoubtedly influenced by the instructor's frequent emendations and corrections needed to bring it into line with contemporary Hebrew. The reading selections, with some particular exceptions, came in for criticism as feeling archaic. For many years there existed no textbook on the market which is adequate or up-to-date for college level instruction in modern Hebrew. Moshe Greenberg's Introduction to Hebrew (Prentice-Hall, 1965) and Thomas O. Lambdin's Introduction to Biblical Hebrew (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971) are excellent philological textbooks designed for courses in elementary Hebrew, but at the biblical level, though Greenberg's text is designed to present biblical Hebrew as a living language. Recently, however, four texts, totally independent one from another and each one based on many years of classroom instruction have appeared and despite some short comings will aid in filling the lacuna. The textbooks are: L. Uveeler and N. M. Bronswick, Hayesod (New York, 1972), and M. Feinstein, Basic Hebrew (New York, 1973), and M. Mansoor, Contemporary Hebrew (New York, 1976), and E. Coffin, Lessons in Modern Hebrew (Ann Arbor, 1977).

The two-year Hebrew language program at Valley is architectonic. Elementary Hebrew I is structured to lead to Elementary Hebrew II which continues the presentation of grammatical forms, provides additional training in oral and written composition, and reading. Intermediate Hebrew I provides further amplification of grammar, and readings of texts from modern, biblical, and medieval/rabbinical literature. Intermediate Hebrew II completes the presentation of grammar (essentially, the Hebrew verb and noun); readings of unvocalized texts, primarily of modern literature; introduction of

newspaper Hebrew; and ample opportunity for compositions and conversation.

In conclusion, the language classes, supplemented by a variety of audio-visual aids, such as tapes, filmstrips, recordings of Hebrew songs, etc., are designed to provide (1) knowledge of basic fundamentals of Hebrew structure; (2) a knowledge of current Israeli Hebrew necessary for everyday speech and comprehension; (3) a cognizance of Hebrew linguistics; (4) a solid background for advanced Hebrew; (5) preparation for textual classes in Bible, medieval, and modern Hebrew poetry, essay, prose, and newspaper Hebrew; and (6) an introductory appreciation of important aspects related to Hebrew culture and the civilization of modern Israel.

The goals of the Los Angeles Valley College Jewish Studies Department and the type of student enrolled in the classes are primary factors in determining the makeup and how a class of Hebrew literature in translation is taught.

Among the objectives of the program are: to satisfy the cultural and intellectual interests of the college community and the citizens living in the area served by the college; to give students an opportunity to appreciate Jewish heritage in all its aspects; to help students develop an understanding of the unique Judaic contribution to world civilization in general, and to western civilization in particular; and to tell the story often ignored in studies at most colleges and universities of one of the oldest continuing cultures in the history of mankind.

A study of those students who enrolled in Jewish Studies courses at Los Angeles Valley College in 1970-1975 found that 76% were Jewish, 80% were transfer students, and 51% were over 21. A number of these adult students were professionals (doctors, lawyers, and teachers), but the majority were housewifes over 35, married daughters of immigrant Jews. The survey showed that the average Jewish Studies student comes from a moderate Jewish background with synagogue affiliation more traditional (61%) than liberal or modern experiential (33%); 7% no response. He has received an elementary Jewish education (90%), probably in the afternoon Hebrew school (60%) rather than in the all day Jewish school (10%) or Sunday school (20%). Fifty-five percent of the respondents are the products of secondary Jewish education, including 7% who studied in all day Jewish high schools, 28% who finished in Hebrew afternoon high schools, and 20% who finished confirmation programs. Approximately two-thirds have been to Israel (23%) and/or had experiences in Jewish content camps (40%).

The study also showed that fully 94% of the students came from the 21 Valley communities served by the college. Many are classified in the stable working class or lower middle class with a small portion from the professional-managerial and lower classes. The reasons given by students surveyed for enrolling in Jewish Studies courses include: self-identification with one's heritage, desire for an introduction to the accomplishments of the Jewish people, and participation in a meaningful academic experience. Finally, most students expressed a desire to take only one Jewish Studies class in their undergraduate career.

Information on the characteristics of students helped us to emphasize flexibility, innovation, implementation, interest, and relevancy in our teaching methodology. The college classroom should not serve as a podium for intellectual masturbation or be a forum for undisciplined bull sessions. Some information and delight may develop from such performances but little intellectual honesty and proper learning habits can result. Emphasis on relevancy should be student oriented so that students are involved in finding meaning on an individual basis. This may be acheived by the implementation of a teaching style that dialogs with the students as much as is possible, and develops intellectual talents such as comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation rather than the regurgitation of class notes as objectives of written assignments. The topics method for class lecture, discussion, and participation is a successful device in a Hebrew literature in translation class. In the basic language classes, by comparison, students are encouraged to recite in Hebrew and to keep notebooks--not the scribbled jottings derived from a lecture hour, but thoughtfully composed summaries of aspects they had learned in Hebrew theory, linguistics, and grammar. Audio-visual aids and techniques (filmstrips, tapes, music,

etc.) are important features of a language class, and in a program which encourages experimental teaching are used successfully in supplementing course lectures.

The traditional methods of teaching modern literature in the original, found in upper division and graduate courses, viz., translation, expounding of grammatical intricacies, lectures based on instructor's notes from research and graduate seminars, etc., prove less than adequate at a lower division level. In its place, we recommend an historical-critical method which emphasizes the literature as an interpretation of history and in light of other literary works in general, and contemporary Hebrew works in particular. A moderate number of readings from Hebrew poetry, prose, and essay is suggested. One-third of the class time constitutes lectures on the socio-historical forces which have motivated and shaped Jewish life during the last two centuries. Two-thirds of the class hour are devoted to a direct explanation of the assigned texts in order to discern the major trends and values of modern Hebrew literature. A study of literature must not be confused with the history of literature, and thus a confrontation with textual sources more than histories and commentaries is of first importance.

A deeper appreciation of Hebrew literature develops if the instructor plays more of a passive role than is traditionally assigned to him. By encouraging the student to do research at home in order to explicate the text in class, and answer questions of difficulty from his peer group, the instructor is planting in his student, seeds of loyalty to some great literature which otherwise would not grow from the total lecture method that often detaches the student from the material. Furthermore, the student gains self-respect from such an exposure, his own germane ideas are able

to sprout, and a relaxed teacher-student relationship is created. This direct method also enables the professor to grow in stature as an educator. By playing the role of a class catalyst, he has many opportunities to present his own contribution and to refune it in light of class feedback to a greater degree than he could by using the straight lecture method. An ideal educational experience is thus fulfilled since the goal of discovering provocative ideas of great men and women of letters is brought about by professor and student exploring together.

A number of myths exist among senior professors of Hebraica at the University level (Wissenschaft des Judentums) which have no place in the lower division Hebraica. One myth is that what we need to teach are intricacies of grammar and literature, facts, statistics, figures and more grammar, literature, facts, statistics, figures. The students are talked at without mercy, and this is not necessary. What is needed is more effective teaching. Learning involves not only information given, but the recipients' discovery of what that knowledge means. The teaching experience is incomplete if one without the other were to prevail. This is the excitement of learning and teaching alike. Another myth is that a Ph.D. is the guarantee of a good teacher, and that the brilliant researcher is capable of communicating his scholarship in the classroom situation. The fact is--and students surveys bear this out time and time again--that a good researcher becomes a good teacher only if he works at it. This is not to say that research and publication are exclusive of a professor's total role on campus, but to stress that his first responsibility is to be a competent teacher and good teaching does not necessarily mean scholarship. Similarly, the "specialized scholar" or Hebraica who claims that there are principles and concepts of Hebrew historiography too profound for the novice to grasp and

thus skips over them in his lectures underestimates athe ability of a college-educated person, and would not be successful in teaching lower division Hebraica. Finally, there is the myth that the subject matter alone creates the enthusiasm for course learning. This is only partially true. The personal charm of a teacher can stimulate learning as well. The enthusiasm of an instructor to his subject matter, a stimulating voice pattern, an exciting delivery style, etc., do make the difference between classroom boredom and a living teaching experience.

At the present time at Los Angeles Valley College, there exist three courses where literature is taught in English translation under the auspices of the Department of Jewish Studies. One of these classes is Contemporary Hebrew Literature in Translation. The class consists of lectures and discussions in English on the Hebrew literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a background of earlier works. The attached course syllabus indicates that students read translations of principal writers of modern Hebrew poetry, essay and short story. The underlying hopes of the course are several: to expose students to a rich literature on critical issues within an historical-cultural context, to offer a variety of written activities for learning to happen effectively, and to create an atmosphere where individual student concerns and rigorous academic research complement each other.

Modern Hebrew Literature in Translation: Jewish Studies 3

Los Angeles Valley College
M-W-F 11:00 A.M., FL113
Office: FL115

1. Instructor: Zev Garber, Associate Professor and Chairman, Jewish Studies Dept.
2. Office Hours: Daily, 10:00 A.M. in FL115 (ext.384), and by appointment.
3. Class Meetings: Regular attendance at class meetings will be expected of all those enrolled in the course. In addition, we will schedule several outside of class meetings to discuss with students, aspects of Hebrew literature that we are studying. Take advantage.
4. Class Procedure: Each class can be a happening and a learning experience if you come prepared. Therefore, read all assigned readings which are announced in class, and critically reflect on the thoughts therein. The lecture will develope the subject matter beyond the readings. At the end of each topic there will be ample time for questions and discussions.
5. Required Texts:

   * Alter, Robert, Modern Hebrew Literature. Behrman House, 1975.
   * Agnon, S. Y., Twenty-One Stories. Schocken Books, 1970.
   * Halkin, S., Modern Hebrew Literature. Schocken Books, 1970.
   * Hertzberg, H., The Zionist Idea. Atheneum, 1973.
   * Mintz, Ruth Finer, Modern Hebrew Poetry. University of California Press, 1976.
   * Silberschlag, Eisig, From Renaissance to Renaissance. KTAV, Part I, '73; Part II, '76.
   * From time to time, readings will be given out during the class hour.

6. Written Assignments: Five impressionistic papers, 8-12 pages in length, will be required from the following topics:

   A. The dilemma of Haskalah literature: trends and values (use readings and class lectures as a starting point).

   OR

   The nature of Haskalah literature and the Science of Judaism: trends and values.

   B. A critique of H. N. Bialik, The Pool or In The City of Slaughter.

   OR

   Assess the contribution of H. N. Bialik and S. Tohernichovsky to modern Hebrew literature.

   C. The Individual and the Group as expressed in the Hebrew Essay. Be specific.

   OR

   Nature motifs in modern Hebrew poetry.

D. The meaning of martyrdom and survival in the writings of 5 poets/ authors discussed in class or in readings.

OR

Discuss the attitudes of Ahad Ha'am, Micah Josef Berdinchevsky, A. D. Gordon, and U. Z. Greenberg on Israel: Past, Present, and Future.

E. Explicate fully five recurrent themes in S. Y. Agnon's short story (e.g., man spiritually lost and uprooted from his environment, etc.).

OR

It has been observed by Simon Halkin (Modern Hebrew Literature) and others that contemporary Hebrew literature is primarily a study of the socio-historical forces which have motivated Jewish life during the last two centuries. Comment on this observation and support your answer with specific illustrations.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

The papers are due at the end of the session at which we are scheduled to discuss the topic/author to which they refer. Each paper is worth 18% of the final grade; 10% of the final course grade will be based on class attendance and participation.

LECTURE SCHEDULE (tentative)

1. Haskalah Literature: critique of personalities and literature.
2. The Science of Judaism: aims, goals, methods, personalities.
3. Transition to Nationalism.
   A. Mapu - J. L. Gordon - Mendele Mocher Seforim - Y. L. Peritz - P. Smolenskin - M. Z. Frierberg
4. H. N. Bialik: Poet of Nationalism.
5. Saul Tschernichovsky: The Pagan Hebrew Poet.
6. Zalman Schneour: Urban Poet.
7. Ideologues of Zionism.
   * Precursors (Alkalai, Kalischer, Hess, Ben Yehudah, Pinsker, etc.)
   * T. Herzl and Political Zionism
   * Ahad Ha'am and Cultural Zionism
   * M. J. Berdichevsky: Hebrew Superman
   * A. I. Kook: Religious Zionism
   * A. D. Gordon: Mystical Zionism
8. Halutziut: Return to nature and soil.
   Brenner - Shimoni - Rahel - schlonsky
9. Confronting the Holocaust.
   Lamdan - Shoham - Greenberg - Jabotinsky
10. The short story of S. Y. Agnon, Nobel Laureate.
11. Recent Phases
    * Poetry in Israel
    * The Israeli Novel
    * The Hebrew Drama
12. Hebrew literature in the Diaspora.